

[By Peter Hirschfeld, Barre Montpelier Times Argus](#)

Adam St. Cyr doesn't look like a homeless man. And not too long ago, he wasn't.

A \$50,000-a-year job as a sales associate supported a comfortable life in a New Hampshire condominium. But a drinking problem caught up with the Gulf War veteran when a DUI cost him his job. After depleting his savings, and living for two months without electricity, St. Cyr hit bottom.

"I realized, sitting on my porch surrounded by beer cans, that this thing isn't working for me anymore," St. Cyr says.

St. Cyr, who kicked his alcohol addiction at a six-week detoxification program at the VA hospital in White River Junction, is one of 15 residents at the Veterans' Place, a transitional housing facility that opened its doors here in September. The two-story building that formerly housed a nursing home now offers military veterans a new lease on life.

"If it wasn't for the VA substance abuse program and this facility right here, I'd more than likely be dead now," St. Cyr told Rep. Peter Welch Saturday morning.

Vermont's Democratic congressman visited the refurbished facility Saturday to talk with residents there about issues facing today's veterans.

For men like St. Cyr, dealing for the first time with the symptoms of post-traumatic stress disorder suffered as a result of his military service, the counseling and brotherhood offered at the Veterans' Place has provided the energy he needs to remake his life. The vet-centric model relies largely on former servicemen to help struggling men deal with their problems.

"There's only two kinds of veterans," said Marcus Murphy, a South Burlington man who volunteers at the facility. "A veteran that needs a little help or a veteran that can give a little help."

But veterans told Welch Saturday that opportunities like the ones offered in Northfield are in short supply. The thousands of Vermont veterans struggling in silence, they said, deserve the support of the country they served.

"I'm just really interested in what they've got going here and I know there's a need for this sort of thing elsewhere in the state," said John Shevenell, a Springfield veteran who travels weekly to Northfield to volunteer at the Veterans' Place.

The Veterans' Place got off the ground thanks to a \$770,000 federal grant and hundreds of hours of volunteer labor on the old building. But the per-diem VA reimbursements that are supposed to fund operating costs don't cover the more than \$20,000 a month it takes to run the facility. Administrators are on a constant chase for donations and grants to keep the place financially viable.

Mike Brennan, program manager at the Veterans' Place, said the model is a successful one that can be duplicated. As a former homeless veteran himself, Brennan said he knows the importance of a veterans-only facility.

"Veterans talk better to veterans," Brennan said. "And that's what I'm doing here – paying it forward. Because I got helped by a veteran when I needed it."

Just four months old, the Veterans' Place is already creating its own success stories. St. Cyr applied to the University of New Hampshire recently, where he plans to get a degree in social work.

"I want to work with veterans," he said.